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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001715

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STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ELECTORAL REFORM COMMITTEE RECEIVES
EXTENSION

REF: ABUJA 1315

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Geoffrey Martineau for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On August 13, The Guardian newspaper reported that President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua announced a four month extension of the Electoral Reform Committee's (ERC) mandate. The deadline extension is not surprising given the committee's delay of several months before beginning its work and the unexpectedly large volume of suggestions gathered during the nationwide public hearings held May 12 to June 25.

Respected civil society representatives on the ERC have not endorsed allegations that the delay is simply a ploy to put off reform. It may be, however, that members of the committee are reluctant to submit their report until after the Supreme Court delivers its ruling on the 2007 Presidential Election. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On August 13, The Guardian reported that President Yar'Adua had granted the ERC a four month extension of its mandate. Given its slow start (convened in August 2007, the Committee lacked proper office space and had only met a handful of times by the end of the year), the deadline extension was not surprising. In addition, on July 9 Muhammadu Uwais, ERC Chairman and former Chief Justice of Nigeria, told Poloff that over 800 memoranda (of public suggestions for reform) were submitted to the committee for review. Uwais showed Poloff approximately 200 of the memoranda, which towered over the Chairman's desk in eight very large bound books. Uwais said that, after the compilation of all the memoranda, the committee members would each read every submission, which necessitated their request for the extension. He added that President Yar'Adua was already aware of their need for additional time, since he told Nigerian Diaspora members during a recent trip to France that he expected to receive electoral reform recommendations in December 2008.

¶3. (C) In a conversation on August 27, John Odah, General Secretary for the Nigeria Labour Congress and ERC member, told Poloff that the committee is meeting daily and that they are working on draft reports. He estimated that by the first week in October they will have a final document, which will then be sent out for printing. He seemed confident that they would submit their recommendations in December. Odah would not yet discuss any emerging proposals, but said he may be able to do so within two weeks. When asked if the

forthcoming recommendations would require action by the National Assembly, he acknowledged they would, adding that Yar'Adua might need to apply the passion he has shown for reform to push the measures through. Odah added that the committee sees its job as the initial step toward "doing the right thing" and that its members will mobilize to put pressure on the National Assembly if necessary.

¶4. (C) Despite the extended tenure, Emma Ezeazu, General Secretary of the Alliance for Credible Elections, did not seem concerned. He told Poloff on August 27 that Nigerians are not concerned with the extension; since the ERC started late, it was expected that they would need additional time to compile their report. Ezeazu remarked that there would be a problem if no report is made in December, or if the content of the report is unsatisfactory.

¶5. (C) Comment: Some (perhaps more skeptical) observers believe the delay in the ERC's report reflects a desire by some within the government to forestall reform until time to enact needed changes begins to run short (as happened after the 2003 elections). While there are certainly some within the PDP establishment who are not interested in changing a system from which they benefit, we note that respected and sometimes outspoken civil society representatives on the ERC like Odah have not mentioned this possibility. It is certainly not unusual here for things to take longer to get going than initially planned, nor is it uncommon for Nigerians to take a somewhat winding road in their deliberations on almost any subject. In any case, we would be surprised if the ERC were to submitted its recommendations

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before the release of the Supreme Court ruling on the 2007 presidential election, expected by late September or early October 2008. End Comment.
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